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Soordas

The Blind Bard who sang about Lord Krishna



Amar Chitra Katha: The Glorious Heritage of India

SOORDAS

THE BLIND BARD WHO SANG ABOUT LORD KRISHNA

Soordas, the blind bard of Brij, occupies a very eminent position in Hindi literature. He is considered the Valmiki of Brij (a dialect of Hindi), not only because he was the first poet to write in that dialect, but also because his works have an epic stature.

Soordas was not only a poet, but also a great composer. His songs became so popular that even during his lifetime, he had become a legend. If Brij is understood today from Rajasthan and Punjab in the West to Assam in the East, the credit goes almost entirely to Soordas' songs. That many of his songs are included even in the Granth Sahab, the holy book of the Sikhs, is adequate testimony to their popularity.

Though he is credited with the composition of 25 works, perhaps he wrote only seven. Of these, *Soor-Sagar* has the pride of place, followed by *Soor-Saravali* and *Sahitya Lahari*. According to legend, *Soor-Sagar* consisted of a lakh of songs, though today only a few thousand of these are known and sung.

Soordas was a follower of the Pushti Cult, founded by Vallabhacharya. This cult looked upon Krishna as the supreme incarnation of God and believed that God can be attained only through His grace. Like many other Vaishnavite cults, the Pushti Cult too held that all those who worship God belong to the same brotherhood, irrespective of their caste.

The affection of Yashoda and the gopis, the cowherd-girls of Brij, for Krishna; the intense love of Radha for Krishna and the dalliance of the latter with the gopis formed the theme of most of his songs.

Script :
Pushpa Bharati

Illustrations:
P.B. Kavadi



AMAR CHITRA KATHA:

The Route to Your Roots

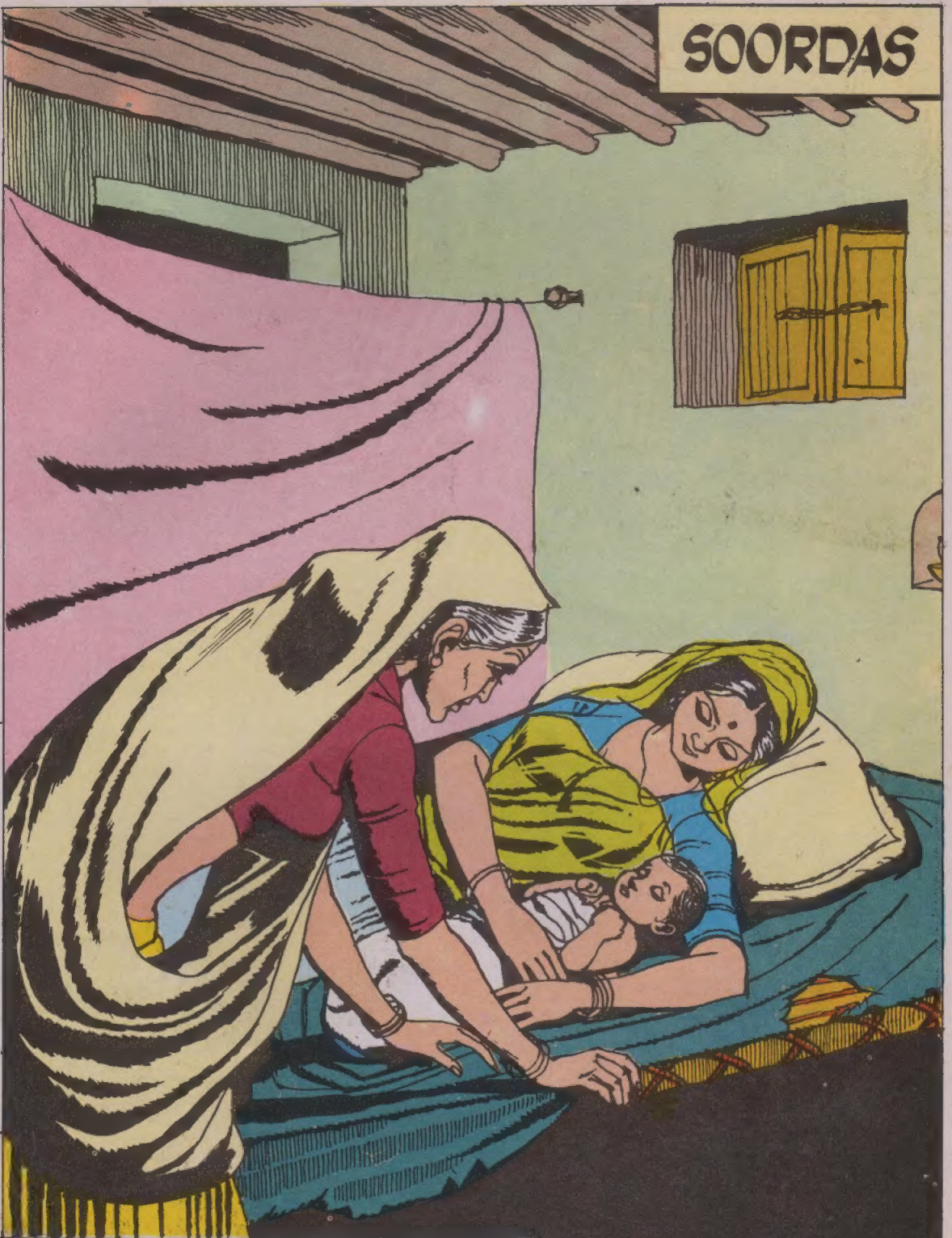
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SOORDAS



SOORDAS WAS BORN IN 1478 A.D. TO A POOR SARASWAT BRAHMAN COUPLE OF SIHI VILLAGE NEAR DELHI.

SOON AFTER HIS BIRTH, THE VILLAGE NURSE MADE A SHOCKING DISCOVERY.

PANDITJI,* THE CHILD SEEMS TO BE BLIND.



THE BRAHMAN WENT INSIDE TO SEE HIS SON.

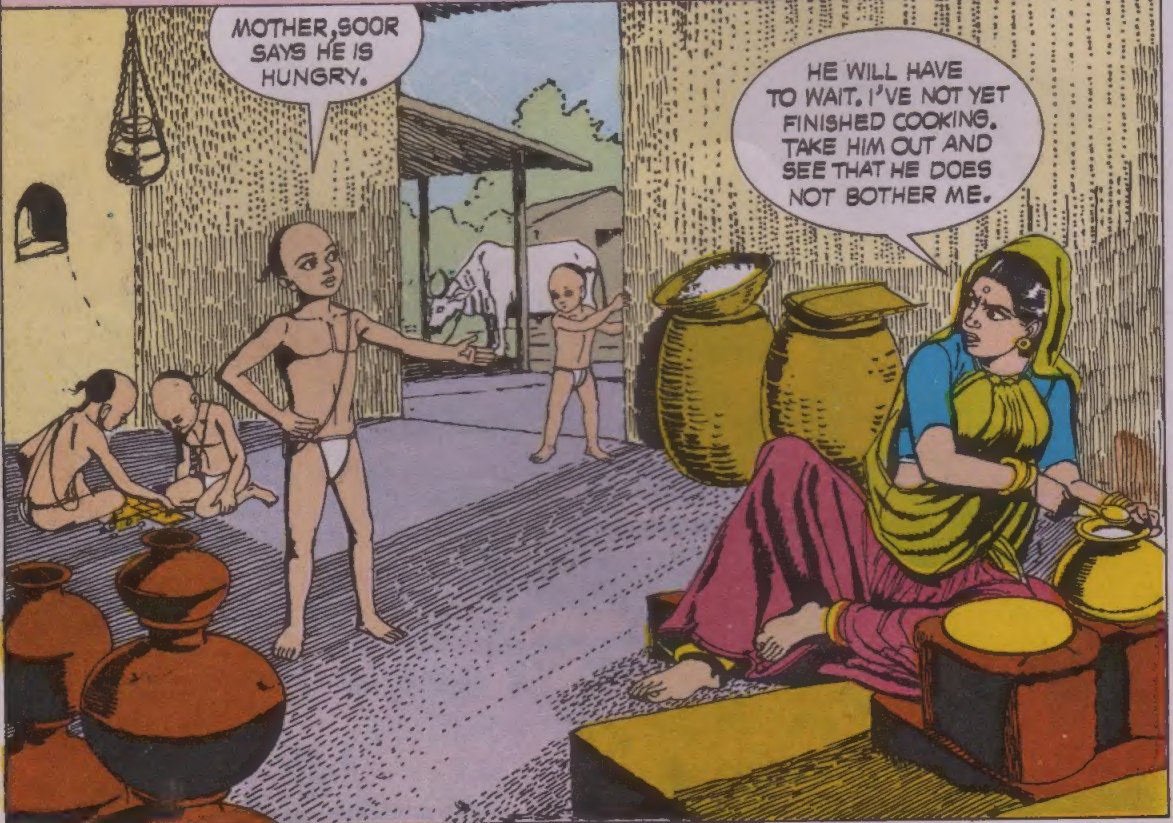
HE IS BLIND. WHAT A NUISANCE!



BY THE TIME THE CHILD WAS THREE YEARS OLD, EVERYONE IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD SEEMED TO HAVE FORGOTTEN HIS REAL NAME. EVEN THE MEMBERS OF HIS OWN FAMILY BEGAN TO CALL HIM SOOR.+

MOTHER, SOOR SAYS HE IS HUNGRY.

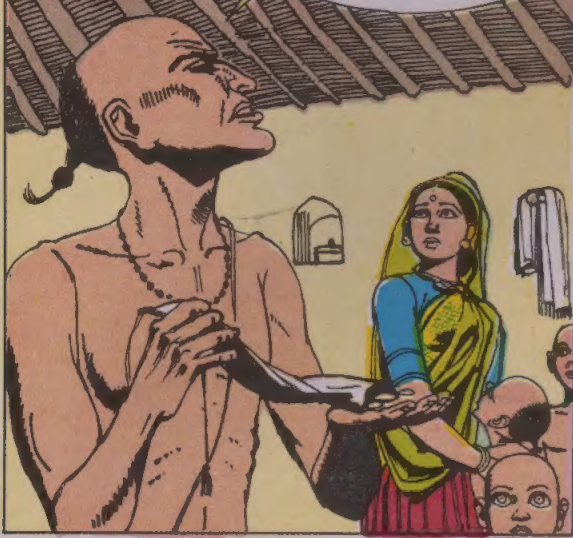
HE WILL HAVE TO WAIT. I'VE NOT YET FINISHED COOKING. TAKE HIM OUT AND SEE THAT HE DOES NOT BOTHER ME.



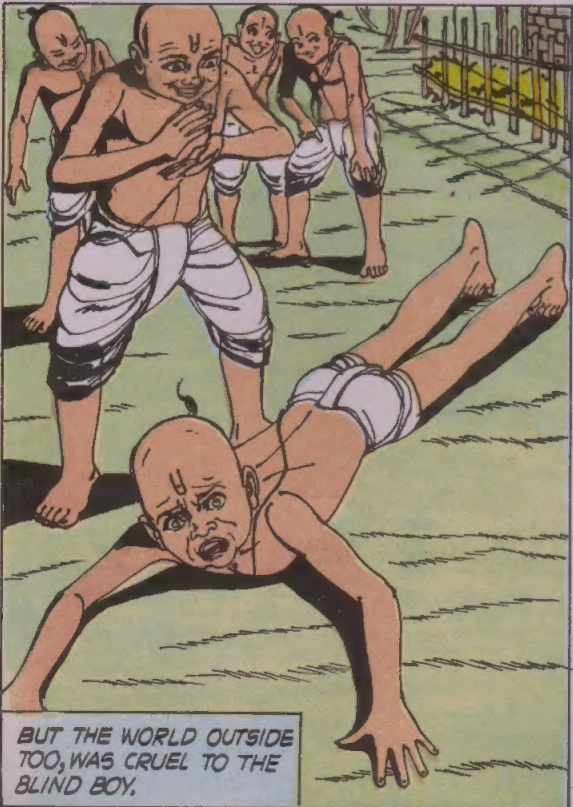
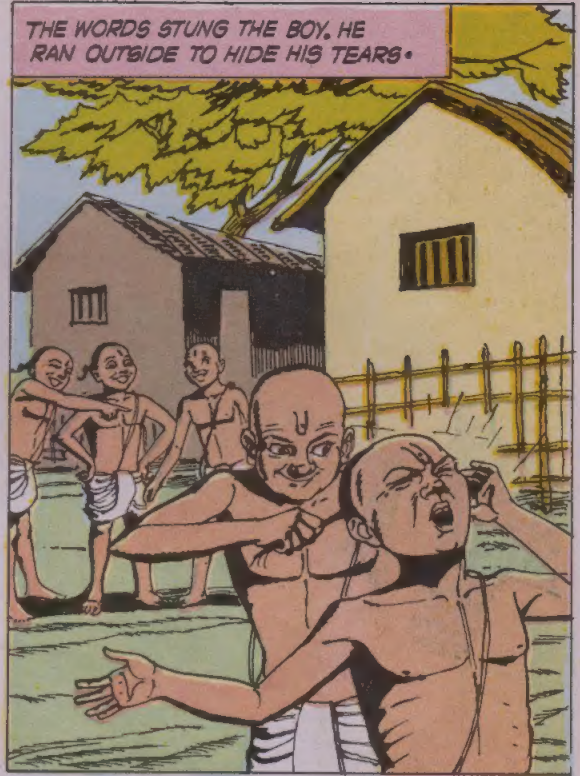
* BRAHMAN'S WERE USUALLY ADDRESSED IN THIS WAY + THE BLIND ONE

ONE YEAR, A FEW DAYS BEFORE THE FESTIVAL OF DIWALI —

THIS YEAR I CAN'T AFFORD NEW CLOTHES FOR ALL THE BOYS. SOOR CAN DO WITH HIS OLD ONES. IT COULDN'T MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE TO THE BLIND FELLOW, ANYWAY.



THE WORDS STUNG THE BOY. HE RAN OUTSIDE TO HIDE HIS TEARS.



BUT THE WORLD OUTSIDE TOO, WAS CRUEL TO THE BLIND BOY.



HURT, GRIMY AND TEARFUL, SOOR CAME TO HIS MOTHER FOR A KIND WORD, A COMFORTING HUG. BUT—

YOU GOOD-FOR-NOTHING!
HOW MANY TIMES HAVE
I TOLD YOU NOT TO GO
OUT? I DON'T HAVE THE
TIME TO BATHE YOU
TEN TIMES A DAY.



SORRY, MOTHER.
I WON'T GO
OUT AGAIN.

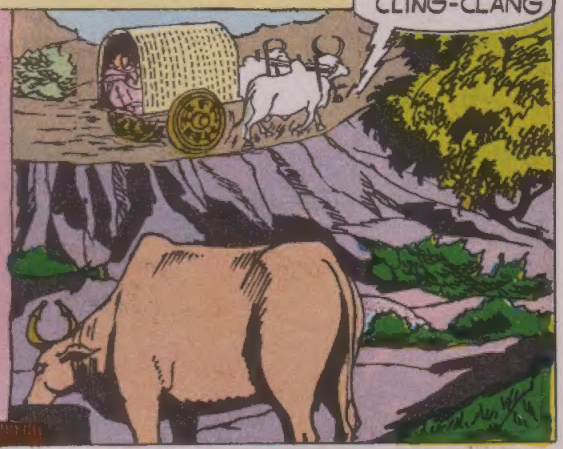


NOT KNOWING WHAT TO DO WITH HIMSELF, THE MISERABLE BOY WENT TO THE VERANDAH OF THE HOUSE. JUST THEN A BAND OF STREET-SINGERS PASSED BY, SINGING BHAJANS.* THE SOUND OF THEIR MUSIC SOOTHED HIS TROUBLED SOUL.

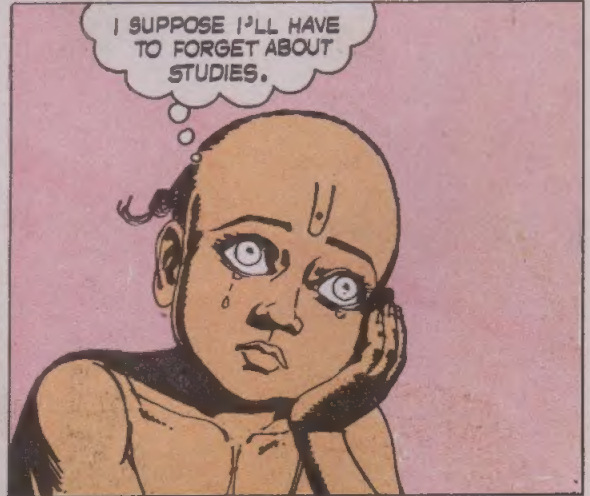
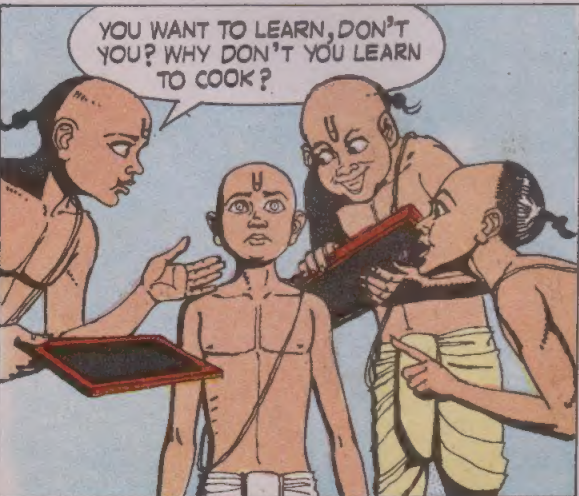
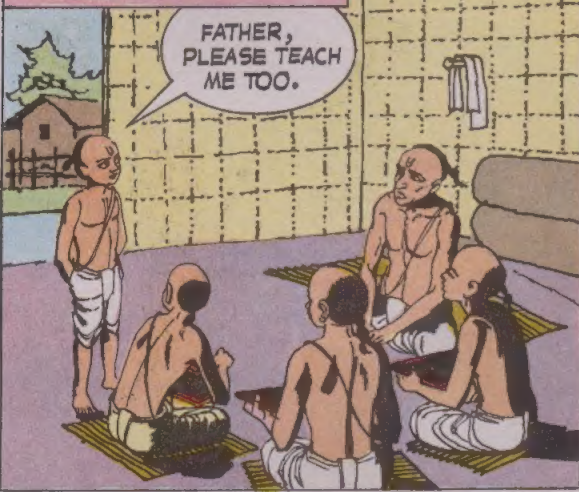


* DEVOTIONAL SONGS

HE FORGOT THAT HE WAS BLIND AND GOOD-FOR-NOTHING. LIFE TOOK ON A NEW MEANING.



HE COULD HEAR HIS ELDER BROTHERS CHANTING SHLOKAS*. HE WENT INDOORS.



A FEW DAYS LATER, THE STREET-SINGERS ONCE AGAIN PASSED BY HIS HOUSE, AS IF IN A TRANCE, SOOR QUIETLY FOLLOWED THEM.



IT WAS ONLY WHEN THE PARTY CAMPED FOR THE NIGHT, ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF THE VILLAGE, THAT THEY NOTICED THE NEWCOMER.



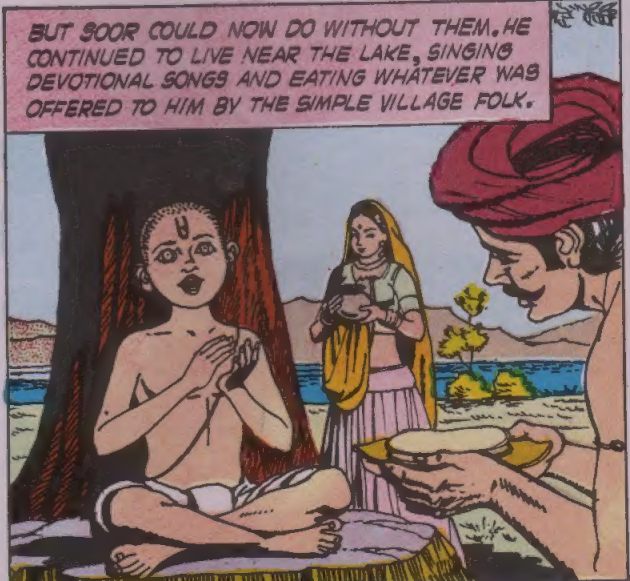
THAT NIGHT THE BOY LISTENED INTENTLY TO THEIR SONGS.

THE FOLLOWING MORNING—

WHY BURDEN OURSELVES WITH A BLIND BOY? LET'S SLIP AWAY WITHOUT HIM.



BUT SOOR COULD NOW DO WITHOUT THEM. HE CONTINUED TO LIVE NEAR THE LAKE, SINGING DEVOTIONAL SONGS AND EATING WHATEVER WAS OFFERED TO HIM BY THE SIMPLE VILLAGE FOLK.



HE LEARNT A NUMBER OF THINGS BY LISTENING TO THE CONVERSATION OF THE SADHUS AND PILGRIMS WHO CAMPED NEAR THE LAKE ON THEIR WAY TO MATHURA AND VRINDAVAN.



DEPRIVED OF ONE OF HIS FIVE SENSES, THE BOY WAS GIFTED WITH THE SIXTH SENSE. BY THE TIME HE WAS FOURTEEN, HE BECAME FAMOUS AS A DIVINER.

I HAVE LOST MY GOAT.
CAN YOU TELL ME
WHERE TO FIND IT?

GO STRAIGHT AND TURN
RIGHT AT THE SECOND
CROSSING, TEN PACES FROM
THERE, YOU WILL FIND
YOUR GOAT.



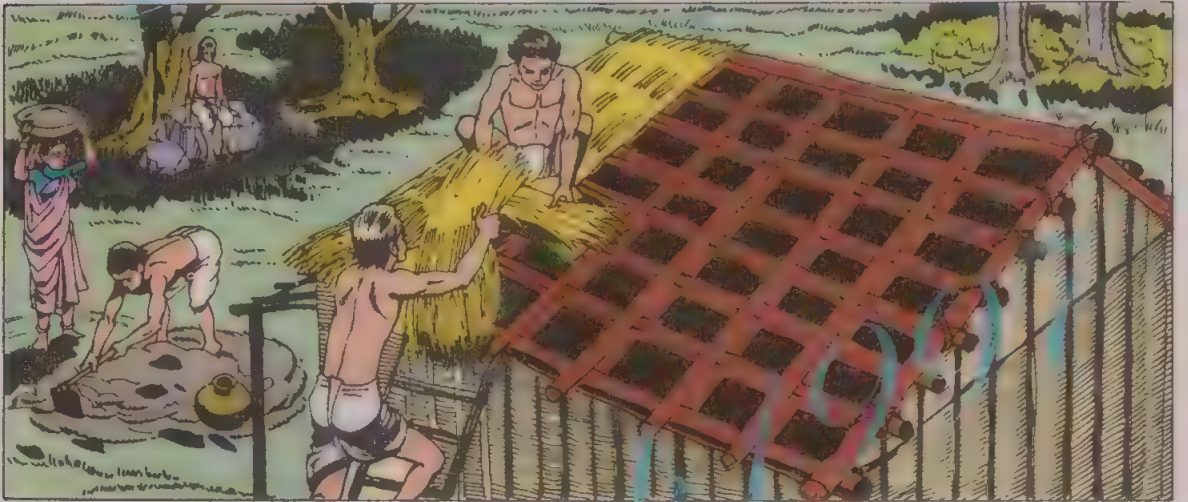
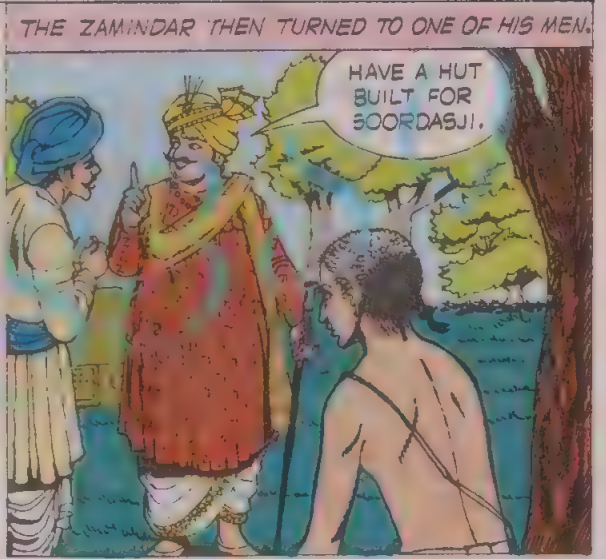
I HAVE TO GO
ON A JOURNEY, SON.
WHEN SHOULD
I LEAVE?

YOU MAY LEAVE ON
THURSDAY, BEFORE NOON.
THAT WOULD BE THE
MOST AUSPICIOUS TIME.

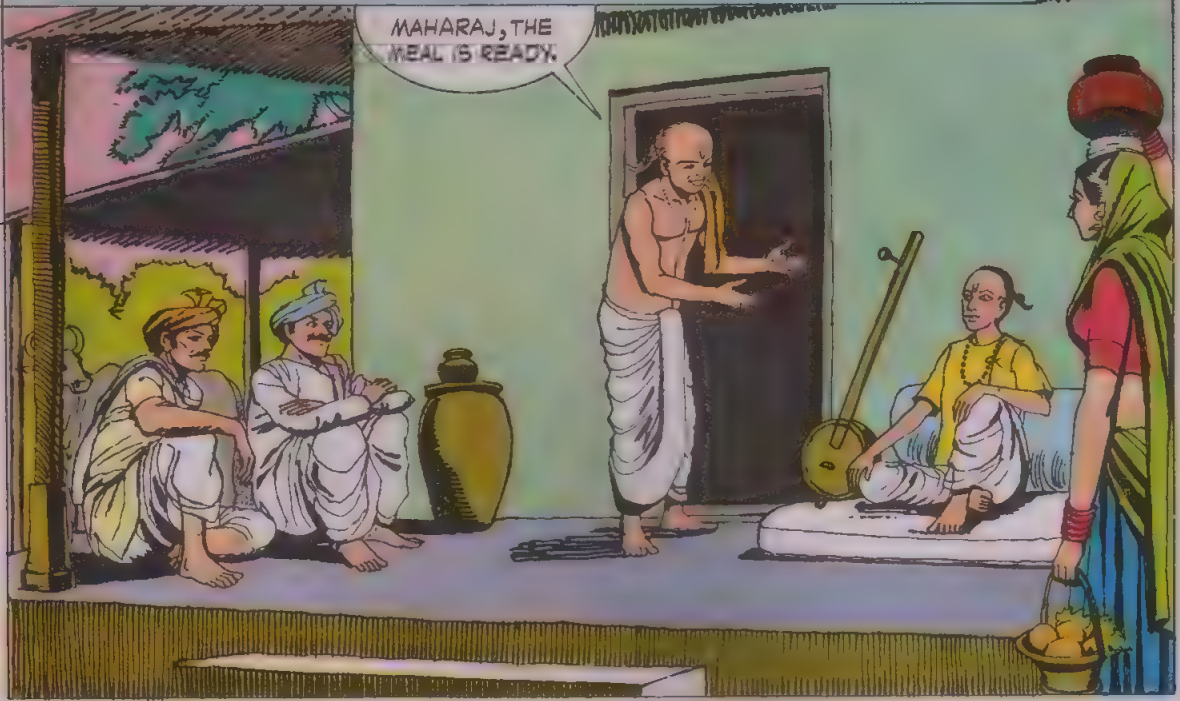


PEOPLE FROM THE NEIGHBOURING VILLAGES OFTEN CAME TO CONSULT SOOR, AND AS A TOKEN OF THEIR APPRECIATION AND RESPECT, THEY WOULD OFFER GIFTS TO THE YOUNG DIVINER.

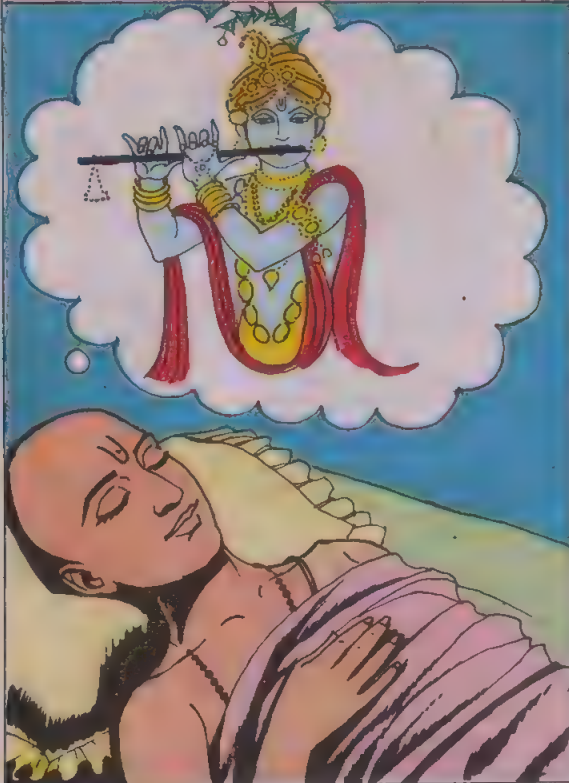




A FEW OF HIS DISCIPLES BEGAN TO STAY WITH SOORDAS IN THE HUT AND TO SERVE HIM.



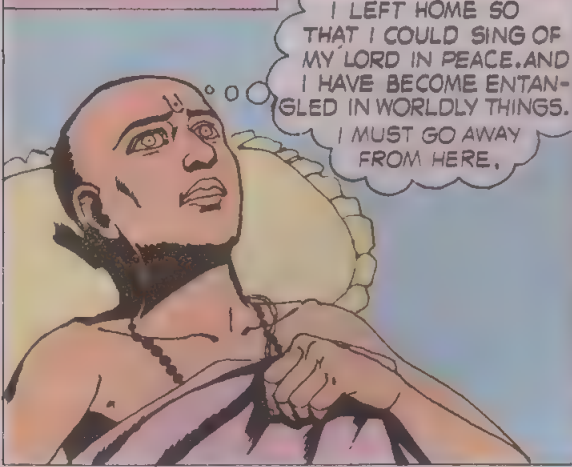
ONE NIGHT, HE SAW KRISHNA IN HIS DREAM...



... FOLLOWED BY HUNDREDS OF DEVOTEES SWAYING TO THE BEAT OF A DEVOTIONAL SONG.

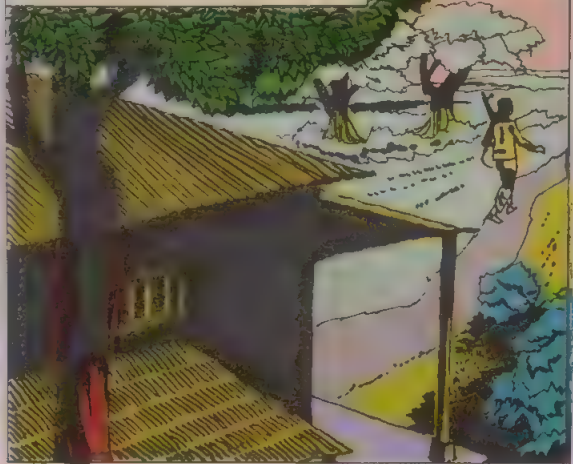


HE SUDDENLY WOKE UP AND SAT MEDITATING THE REST OF THE NIGHT.



I LEFT HOME SO THAT I COULD SING OF MY LORD IN PEACE. AND I HAVE BECOME ENTANGLED IN WORLDLY THINGS. I MUST GO AWAY FROM HERE.

SO, EARLY NEXT MORNING, TAKING ONLY HIS EKTARA WITH HIM, HE SET OUT.



MAHARAJ, WHY ARE YOU LEAVING US? HAVE WE OFFENDED YOU IN ANY WAY?



NOT AT ALL. I HAVE AN INNER URGE TO GO AWAY, AND GO I MUST.



SOORDAS ROAMED ABOUT IN THE JUNGLES, SINGING IN PRAISE OF KRISHNA.

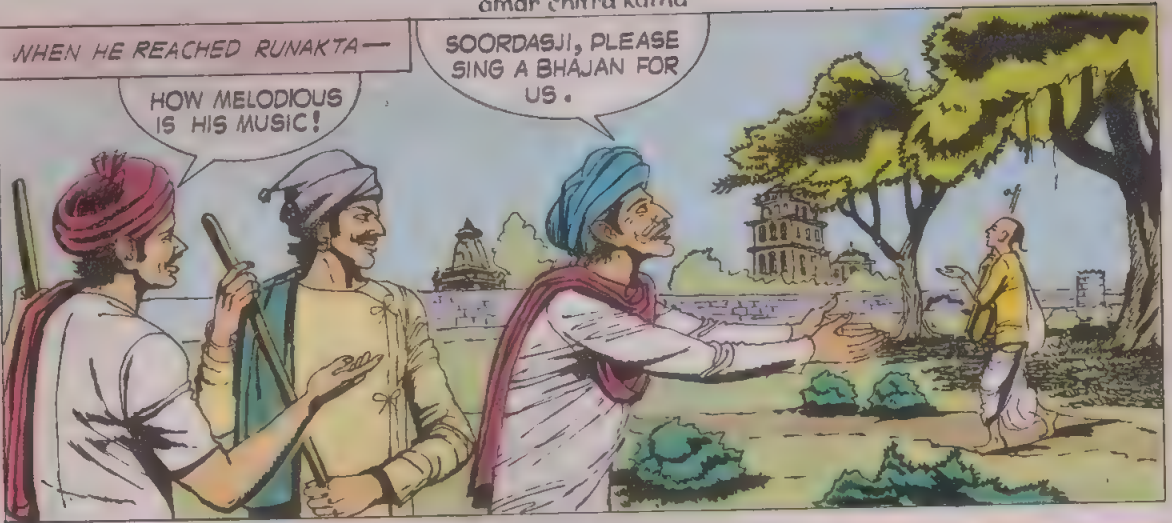


JAI GOPAL!
JAI JAI
GOPAL!

WHEN HE REACHED RUNAKTA—

HOW MELODIOUS
IS HIS MUSIC!

SOORDASJI, PLEASE
SING A BHAJAN FOR
US.



SOORDAS SAT BELOW A PEEPUL TREE AND SANG FOR THEM.



AFTER THE SONG WAS OVER —

THAT WAS DIVINE!
MAHARAJ, WHERE
ARE YOU GOING?

I HAVE NO
DESTINATION.

THEN PLEASE
STAY HERE WITH
US.



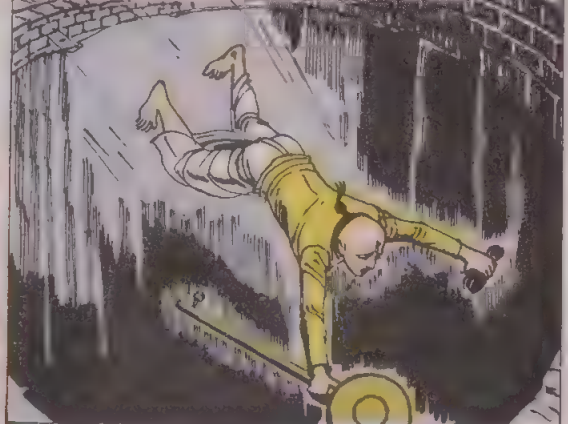
SOON LARGE CROWDS CAME TO LISTEN TO HIS SONGS. THEY BROUGHT FOOD AND GIFTS FOR HIM.

PLEASE ACCEPT THIS, MAHARAJ.



AT LAST, SOORDAS HAD TO GO AWAY AGAIN TO ESCAPE FROM THE WORLD. HE STUMBLED ALONG THROUGH UNUSED PATHS.

AS HE RESTED ON THE PARAPET OF AN ABANDONED WELL, HE FELL INSIDE.



A WEEK LATER —

HOLD ON TO MY ARM. I'VE COME TO SAVE YOU.



A FEW MINUTES LATER, SOORDAS WAS ON THE
SANDY GROUND ABOVE, BUT HIS SAVIOUR HAD
VANISHED.

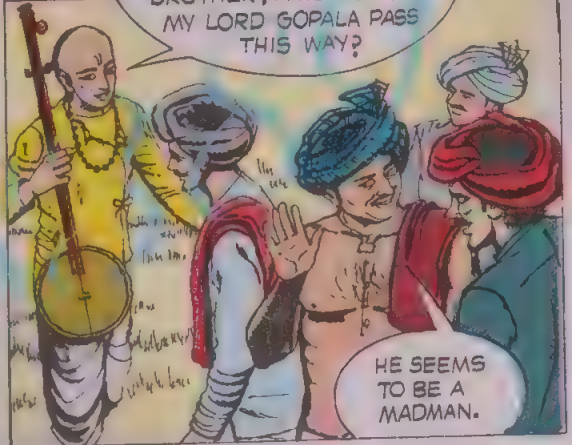
THAT TOUCH WAS DIVINE.
IT COULD BE NONE OTHER
THAN MY LORD GOPALA*
WHO SAVED ME.



SOORDAS MADE A FRANTIC SEARCH FOR HIS
GOPALA.

BROTHER! HAVE YOU SEEN
MY LORD GOPALA PASS
THIS WAY?

HE SEEMS
TO BE A
MADMAN.



IN HIS QUEST FOR GOPALA, HE REACHED GOW-GHAT NEAR MATHURA. HERE HE STAYED FOR MANY YEARS
AND COMPOSED HUNDREDS OF SONGS IN PRAISE OF KRISHNA. MANY BECAME HIS DISCIPLES. HIS FAME
AS THE SINGING MAHATMA* SPREAD FAR AND WIDE.

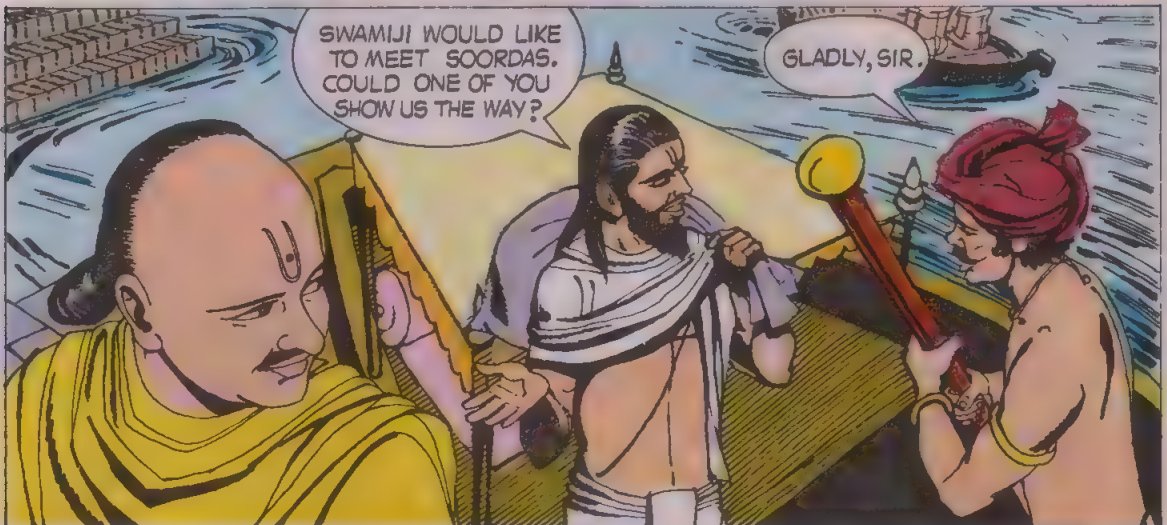
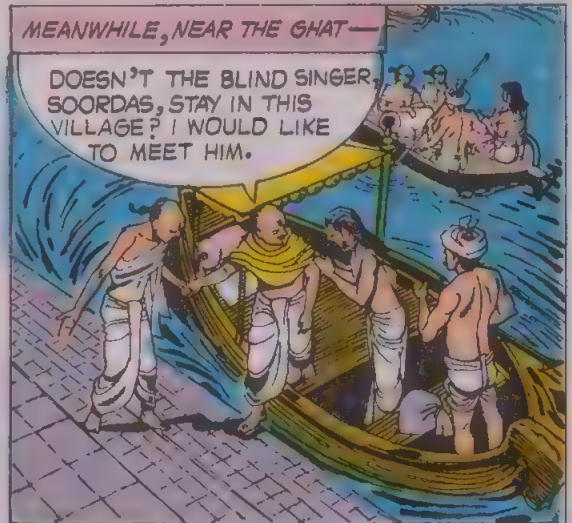
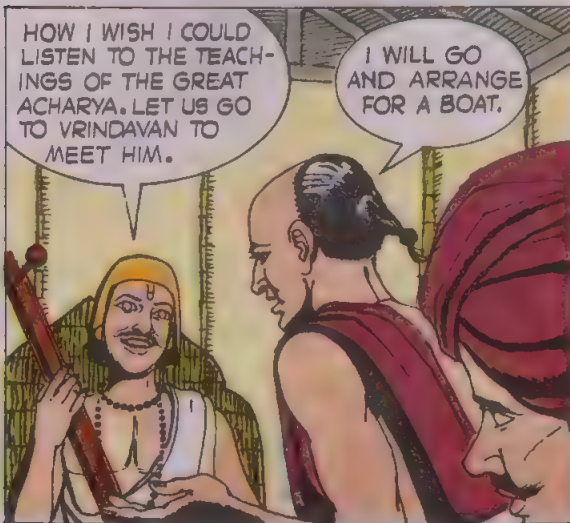
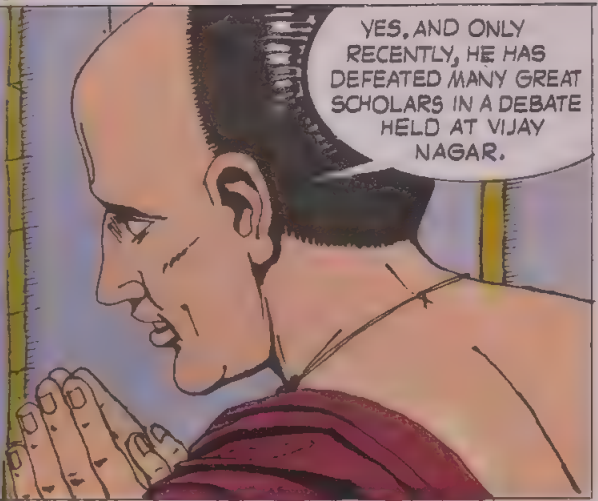
SING OF GOPALA.
YOU WILL FIND PEACE
AND HAPPINESS.



ONE DAY —

MAHATMAJI, VALLABHACHARYA
IS EXPECTED HERE ON HIS WAY
TO VRINDAVAN.





MEANWHILE, SOORDAS'S DISCIPLE HAD RETURNED.

SWAMIJI, VALLABHACHARYA
IS ON HIS WAY HERE TO
MEET YOU.

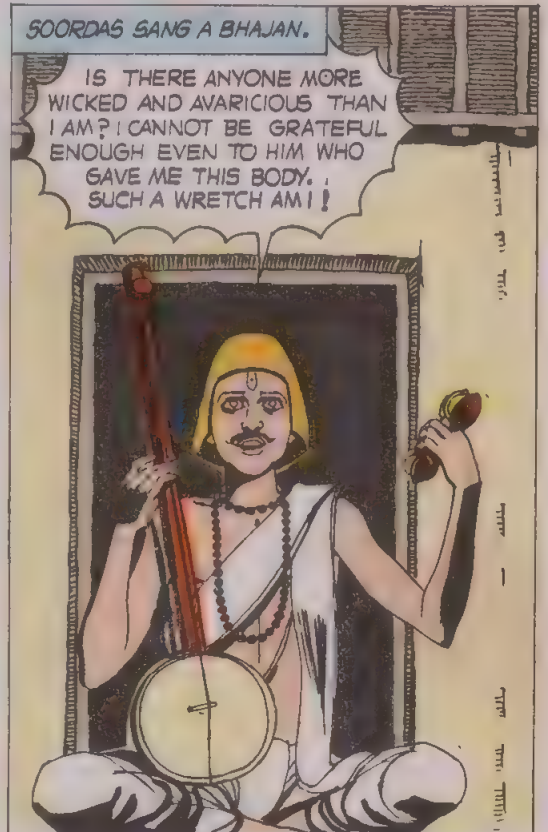
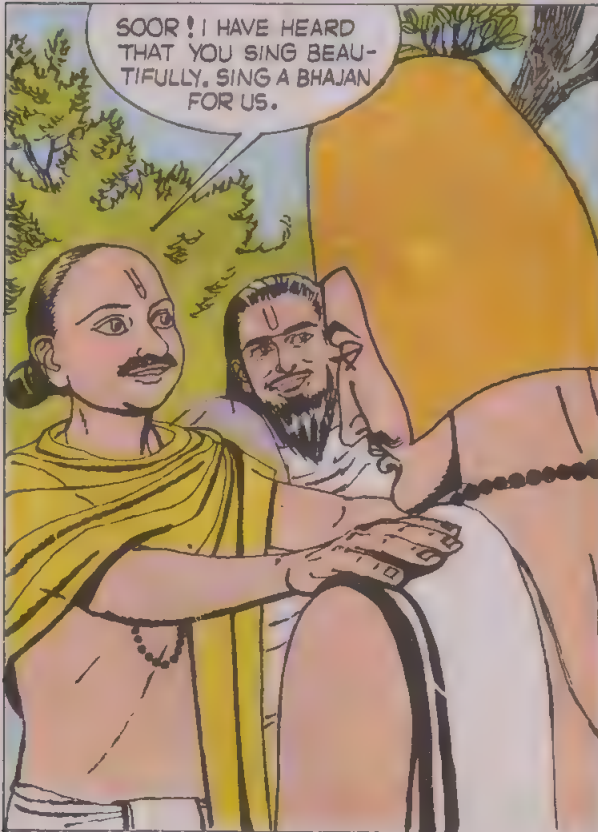
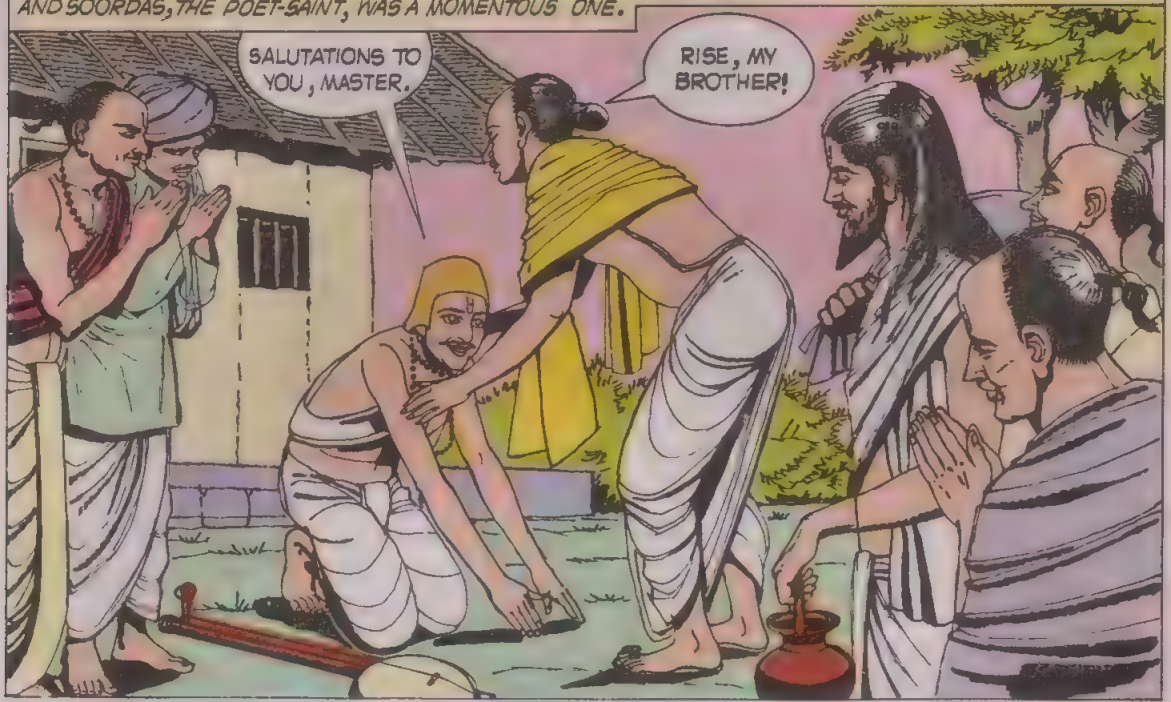
HE IS A LEARNED
MAN. I AM ILLITERATE.
WILL HE EVEN TALK TO
ME? WHAT YOU SAY
COULDN'T BE TRUE.

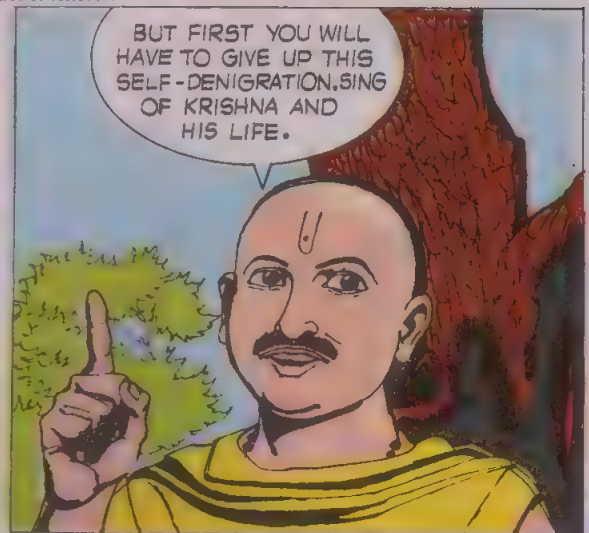
IT IS TRUE,
GURUDEV. THERE
HE IS!



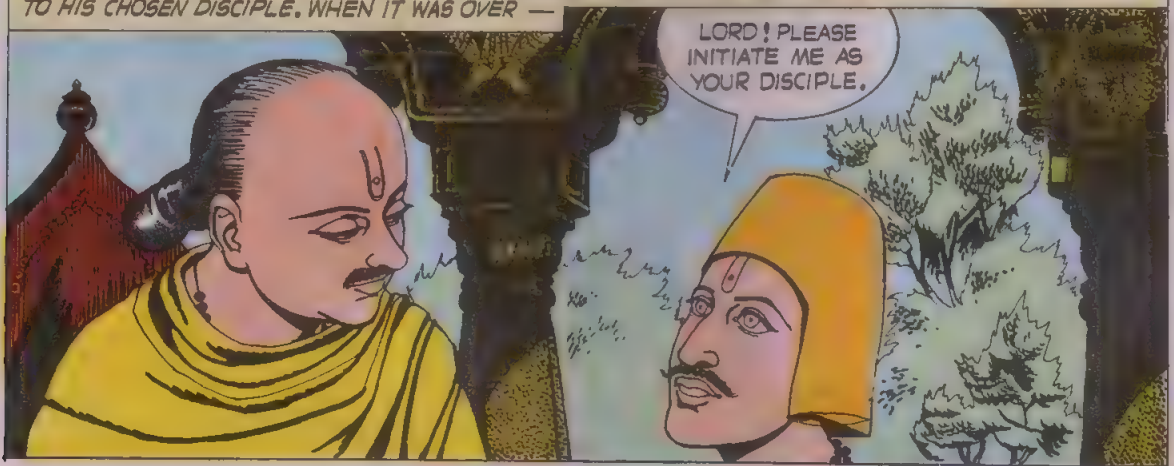
REALLY? I MUST
RUSH TO RECEIVE
HIM WITH HONOUR.

THE MEETING THAT TOOK PLACE BETWEEN VALLABHACHARYA, THE GREATEST SCHOLAR-SAINT OF THE TIME, AND SOORDAS, THE POET-SAINT, WAS A MOMENTOUS ONE.





VALLABHACHARYA STAYED AT GOW-GHAT FOR MANY DAYS, NARRATING THE LIFE AND DEEDS OF KRISHNA TO HIS CHOSEN DISCIPLE. WHEN IT WAS OVER —



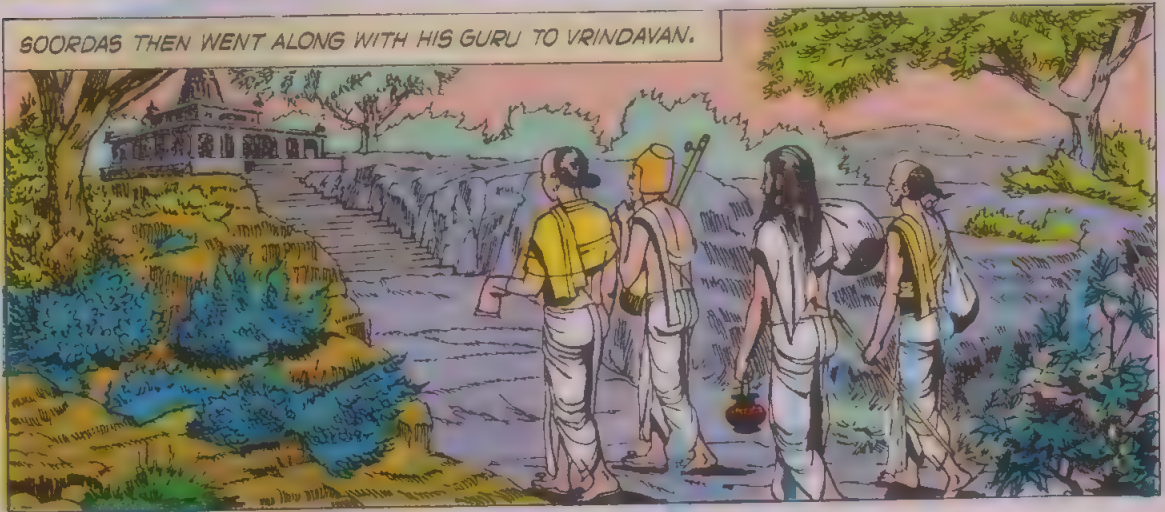
THE NEXT DAY, IN A QUIET SECLUDED PLACE, THE ACHARYA WHISPERED INTO SOORDAS'S EARS.

REPEAT AFTER ME
— SHRI KRISHNAH
SHARANAM MAMA*

SHRI KRISHNAH
SHARANAM MAMA.

THE CHANT WAS REPEATED THREE TIMES.

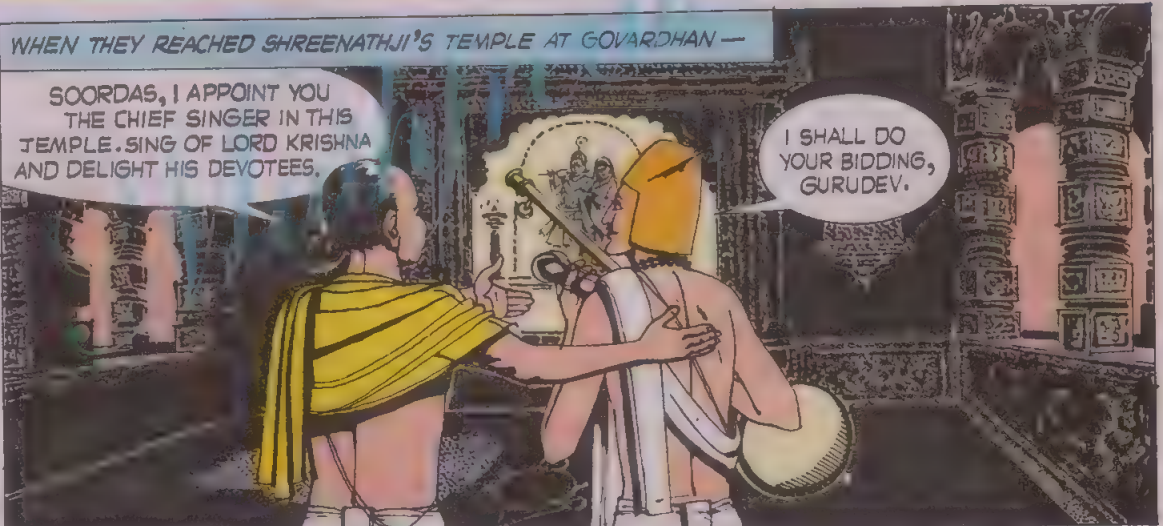
SOORDAS THEN WENT ALONG WITH HIS GURU TO VRINDAVAN.



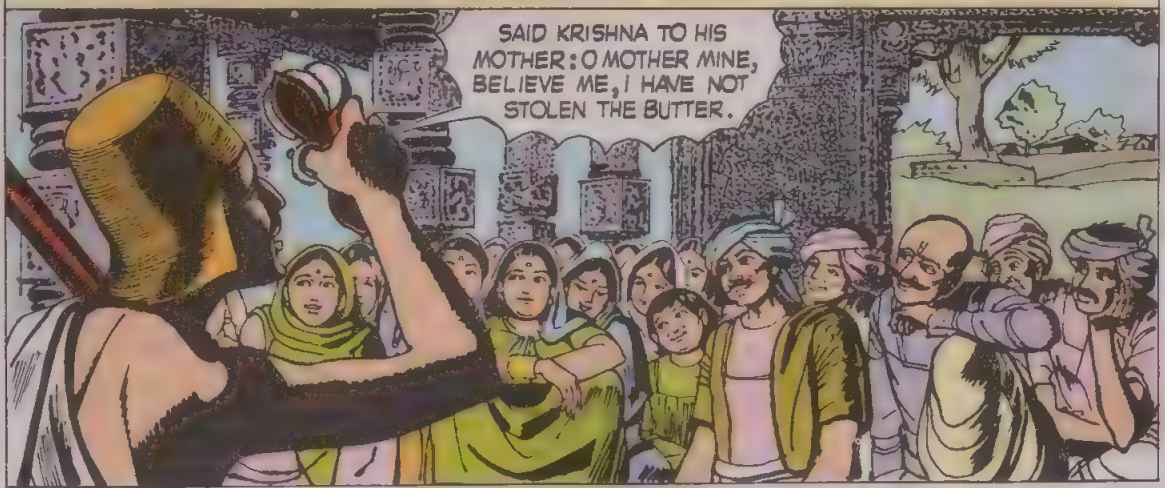
WHEN THEY REACHED SHREENATHJI'S TEMPLE AT GOVARDHAN —

SOORDAS, I APPOINT YOU
THE CHIEF SINGER IN THIS
TEMPLE. SING OF LORD KRISHNA
AND DELIGHT HIS DEVOTEES.

I SHALL DO
YOUR BIDDING,
GURUDEV.

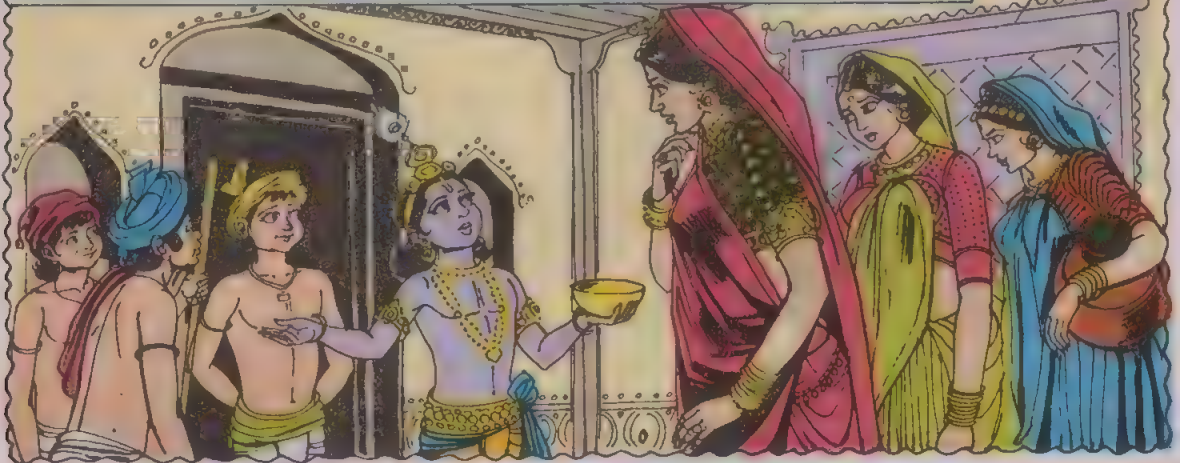


THE ACHARYA WENT AWAY ON HIS MISSION. SOORDAS STAYED ON TO SING OF LORD KRISHNA AND HIS PRANKS.

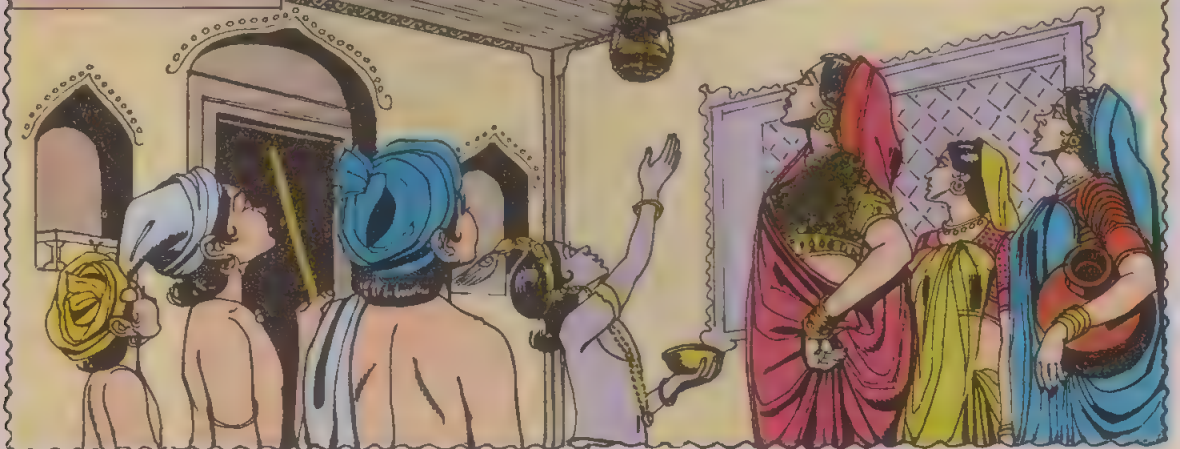


SAID KRISHNA TO HIS MOTHER: O MOTHER MINE, BELIEVE ME, I HAVE NOT STOLEN THE BUTTER.

"THESE FRIENDS OF MINE, OUT OF SHEER SPITE, APPLIED THIS BUTTER ON MY FACE."



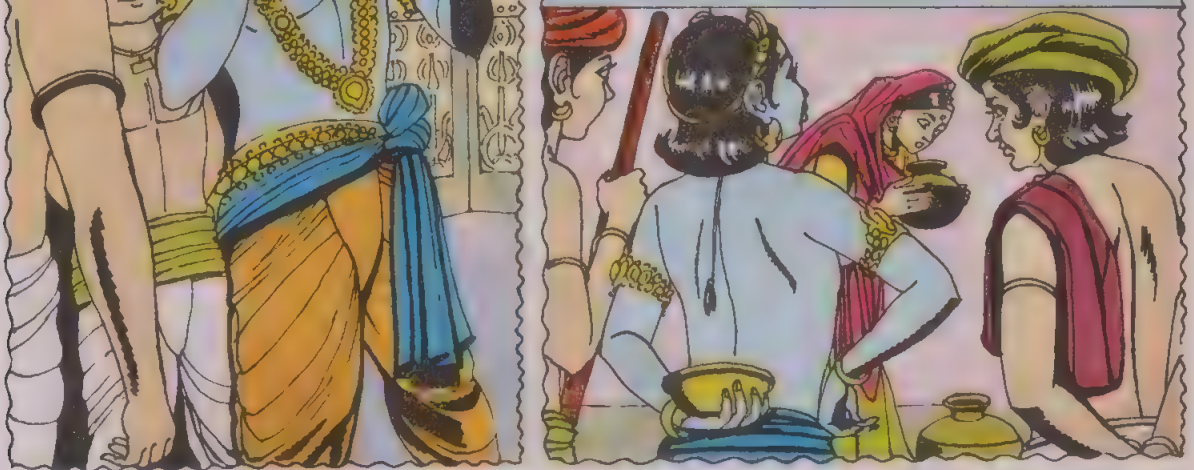
"CAN'T YOU SEE? THE POT CONTAINING THE BUTTER IS KEPT HIGH UP THERE. MY ARMS ARE SHORT, HOW COULD I REACH IT?"



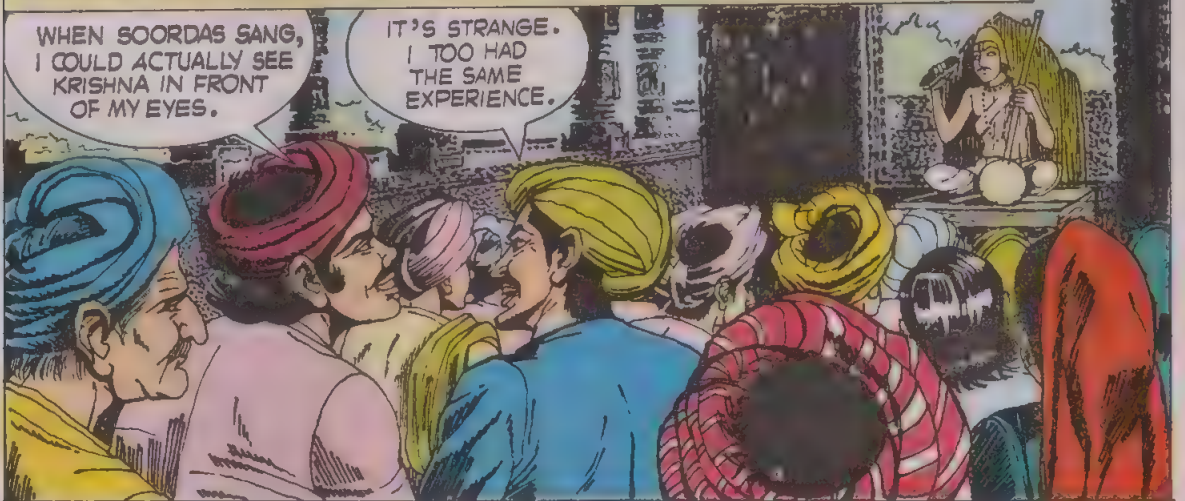
"AS YASHODA REACHED UP TO LOOK INTO THE POT, KRISHNA WIPE OFF THE BUTTER FROM HIS FACE..."



"...AND HID THE BOWL OF BUTTER BEHIND HIS BACK."



THE DEVOTEES COULD NOT FORGET THE VIVID IMAGES CREATED BY SOORDAS'S SONGS.



WHEN SOORDAS SANG,
I COULD ACTUALLY SEE
KRISHNA IN FRONT
OF MY EYES.

IT'S STRANGE.
I TOO HAD
THE SAME
EXPERIENCE.

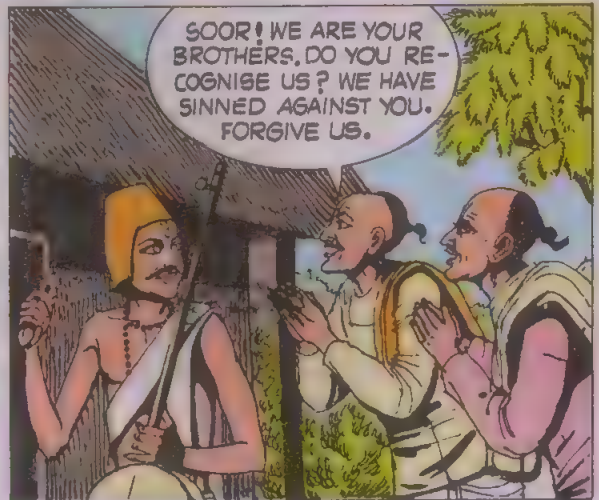
SOORDAS'S FAME SPREAD FAR AND WIDE. ONE DAY, AMONG THE DEVOTEES WHO HAD FLOCKED TO THE TEMPLE OF SHREENATH WERE TWO OF HIS BROTHERS.



THEY FOLLOWED SOOR TO HIS HOUSE WHICH WAS AT PARASOLI, A FEW MILES FROM THE TEMPLE.

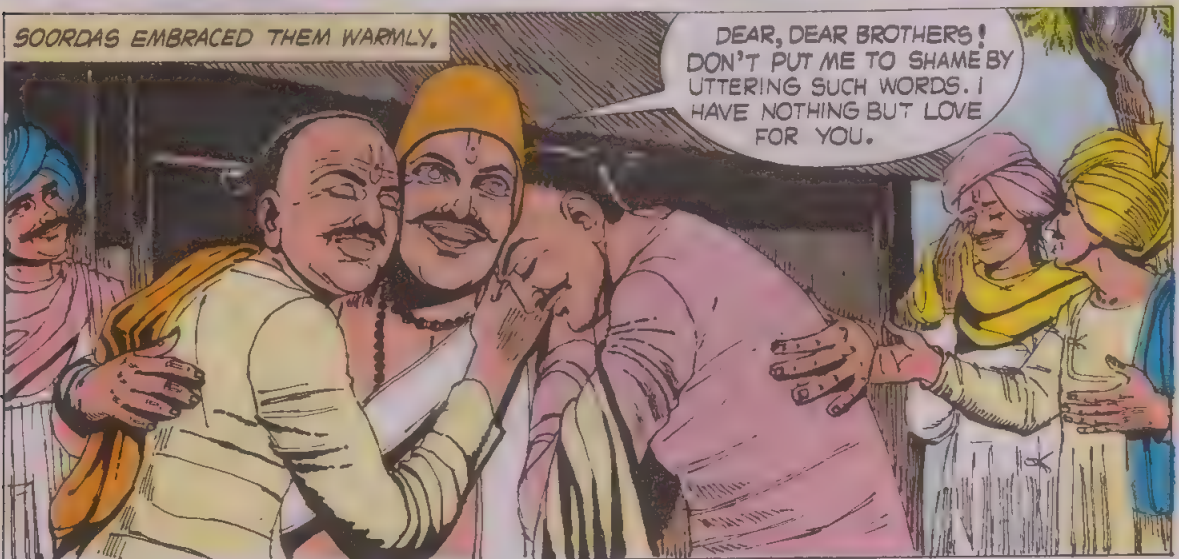


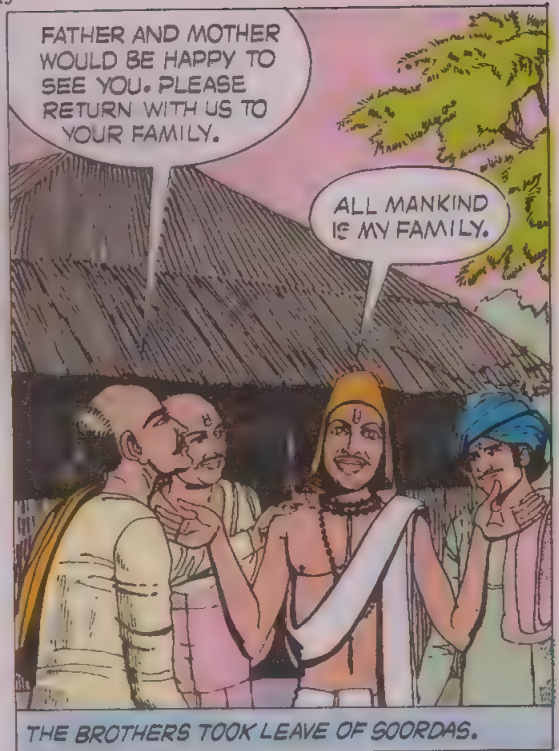
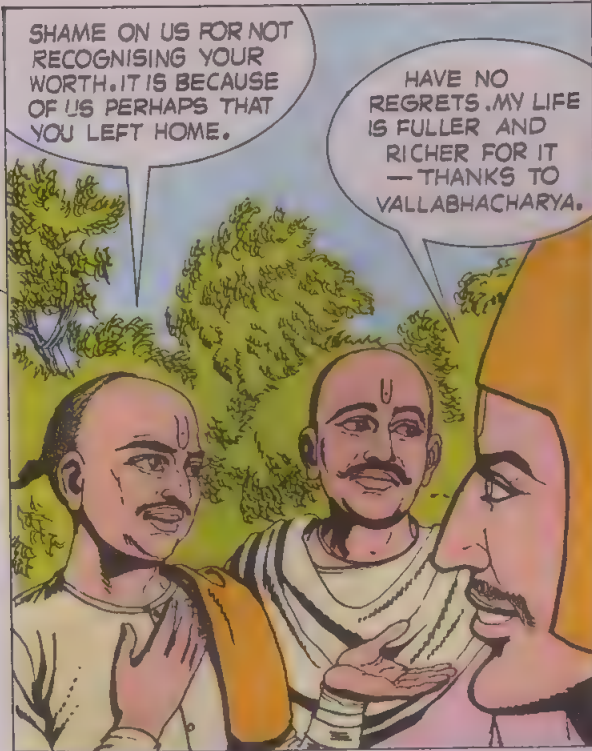
SOOR! WE ARE YOUR BROTHERS. DO YOU RECOGNISE US? WE HAVE SINNED AGAINST YOU. FORGIVE US.



SOORDAS EMBRACED THEM WARMLY.

DEAR, DEAR BROTHERS! DON'T PUT ME TO SHAME BY UTTERING SUCH WORDS. I HAVE NOTHING BUT LOVE FOR YOU.

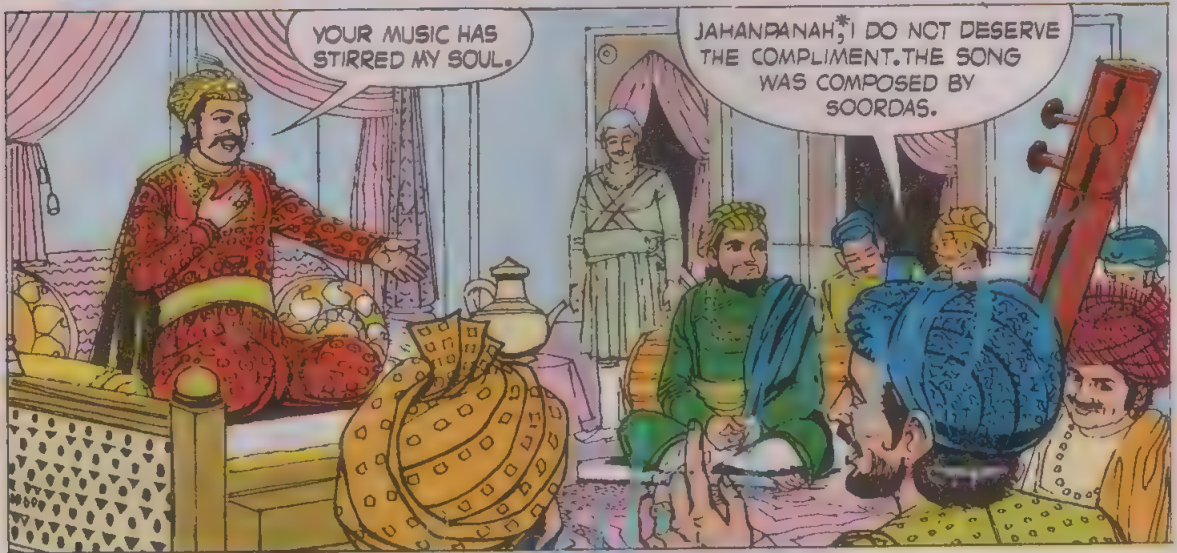
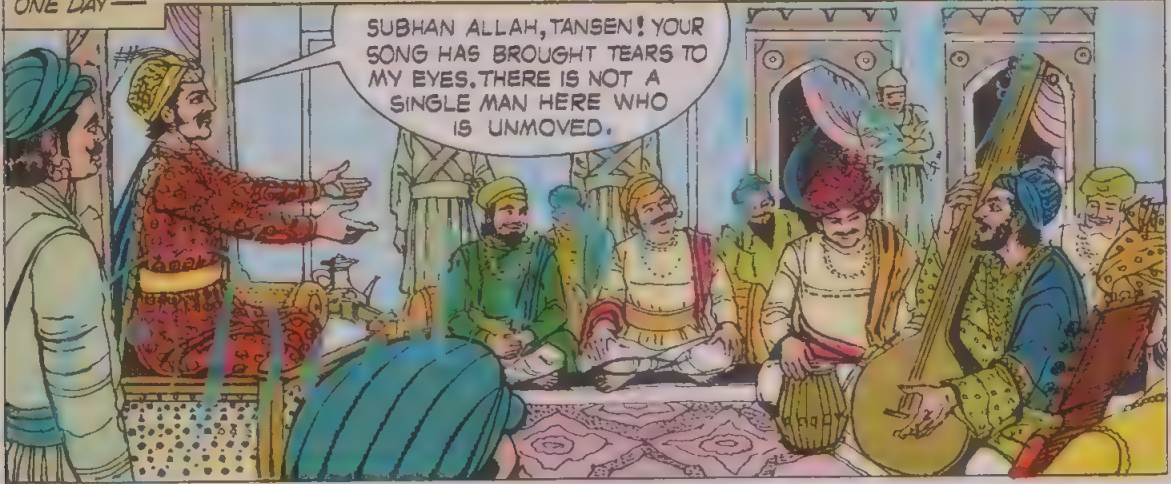


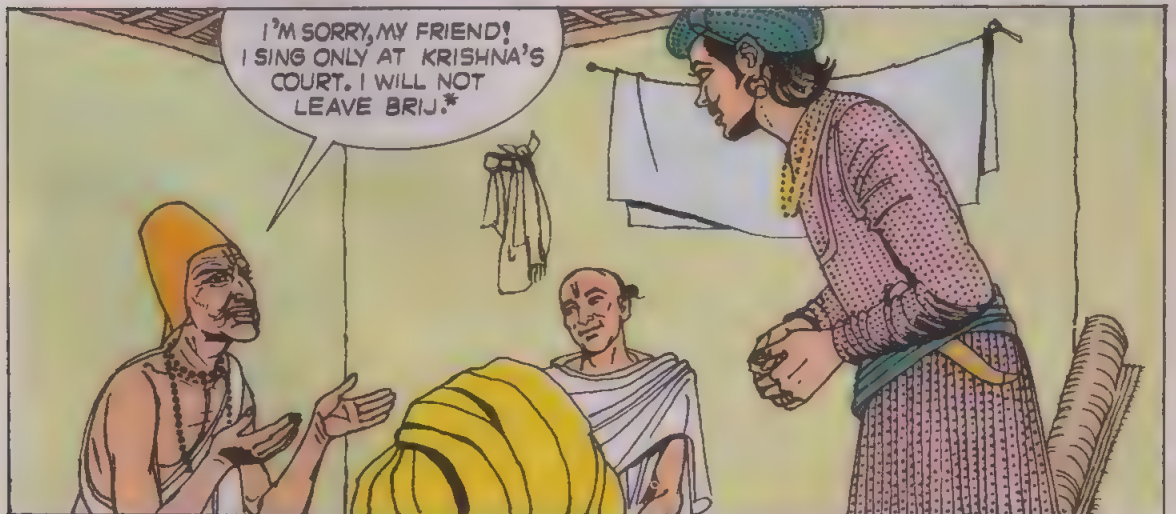
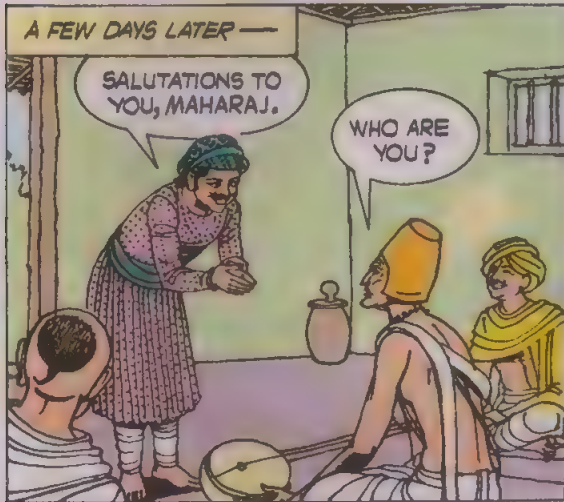


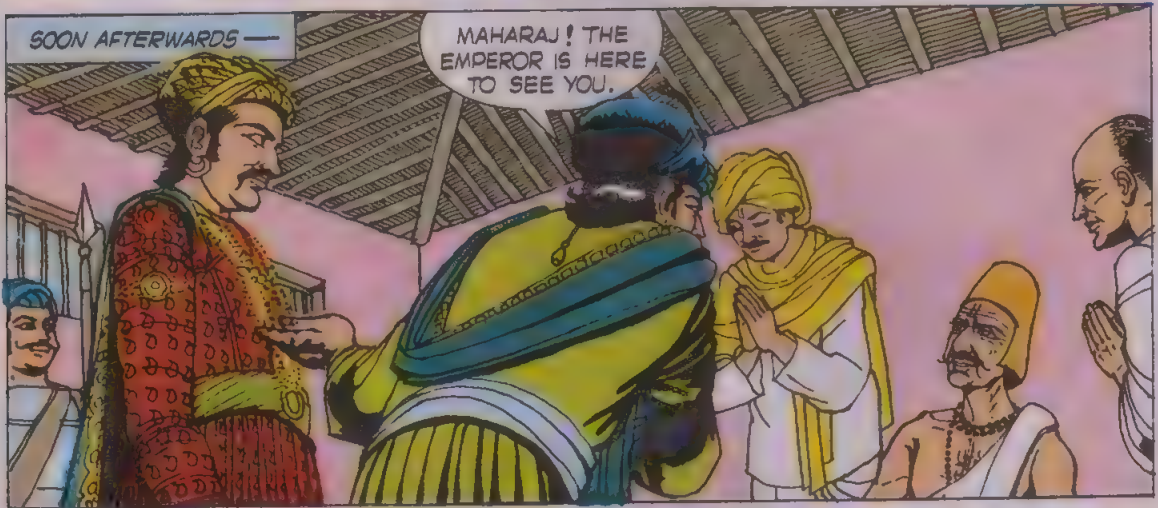
IT DID NOT TAKE THEM LONG TO REALISE WHAT SOORDAS MEANT, FOR HIS SONGS WERE ON EVERYONE'S LIPS.



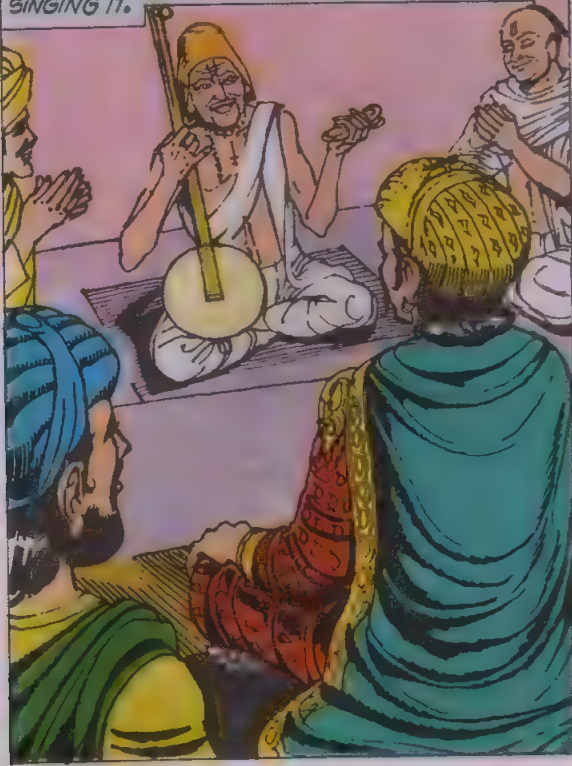
EVEN TANSEN, THE FAMOUS SINGER AT THE COURT OF AKBAR, BEGAN TO SING THE SONGS OF SOORDAS. ONE DAY —







SOORDAS COMPOSED A NEW SONG AND BEGAN SINGING IT.



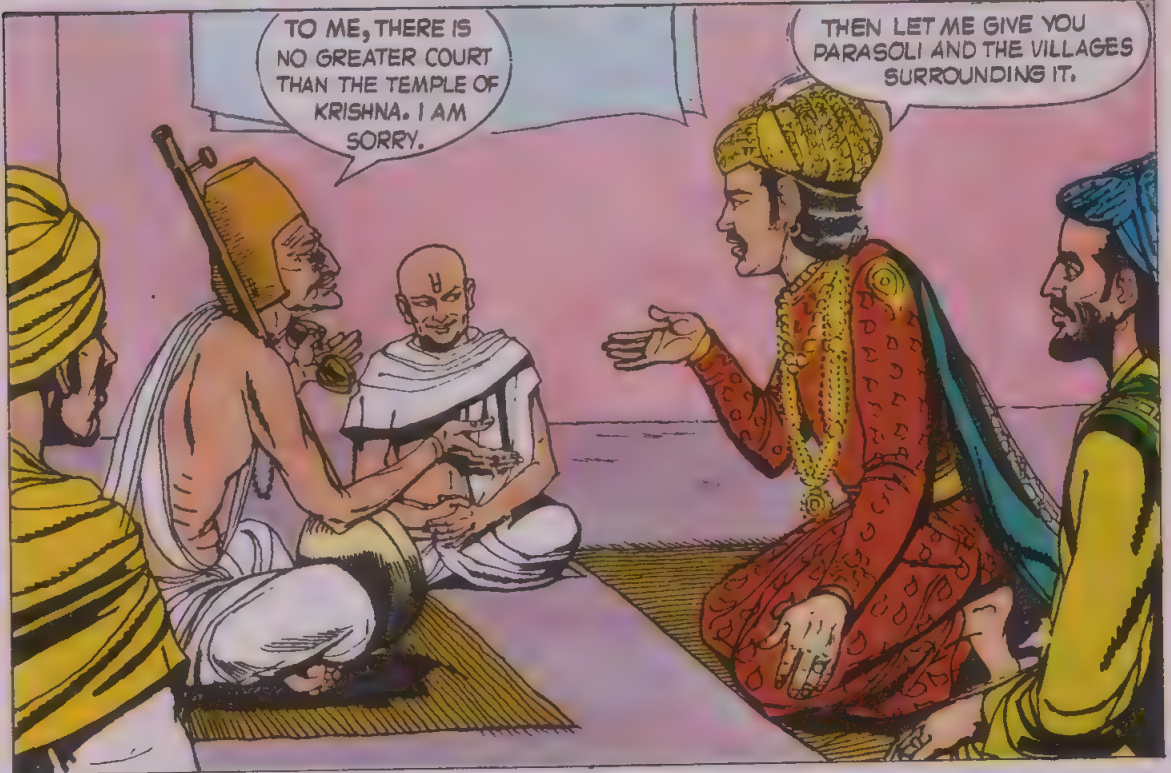
WHEN IT WAS OVER —

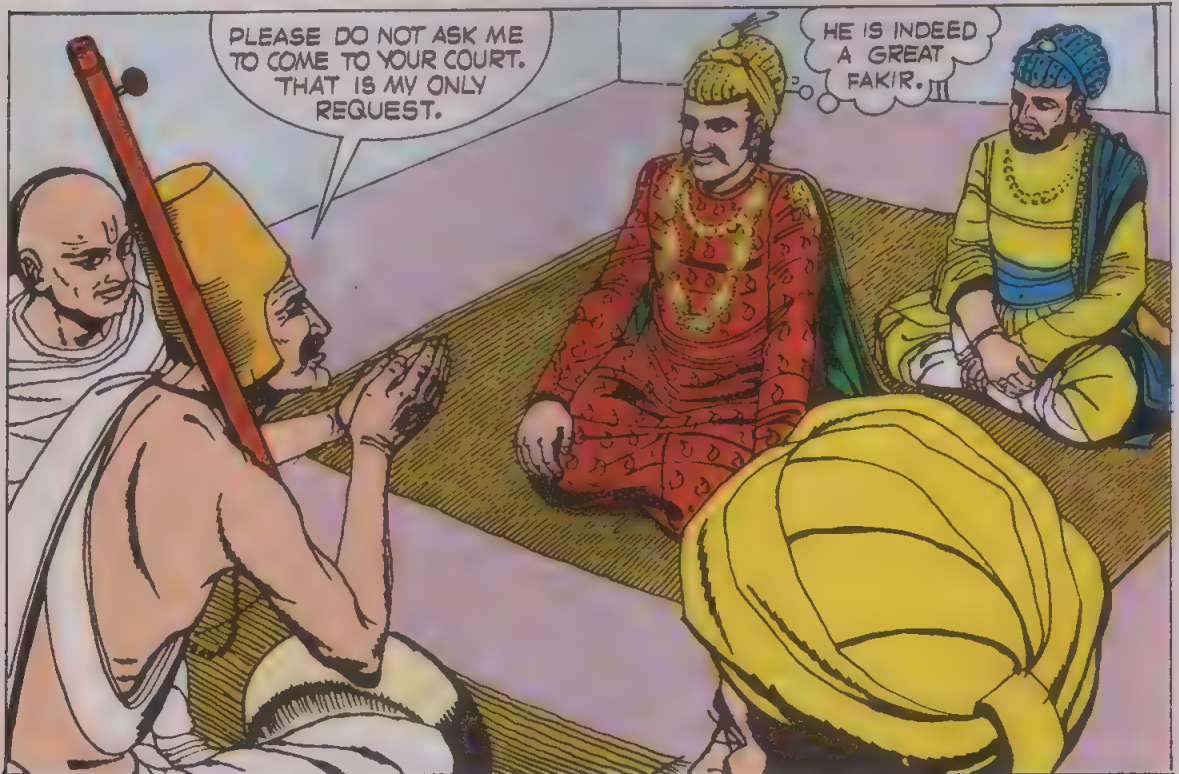
HOW BEAUTIFUL THE WORDS!
HOW HEAVENLY THE MUSIC!
MAHARAJ! YOU MUST ADORN
OUR COURT. PLEASE COME
WITH US.



TO ME, THERE IS
NO GREATER COURT
THAN THE TEMPLE OF
KRISHNA. I AM
SORRY.

THEN LET ME GIVE YOU
PARASOLI AND THE VILLAGES
SURROUNDING IT.





ALL ASPIRING POETS WOULD COME TO SEEK THE BLESSINGS OF THE SINGING MAHATMA AT GOVARDHAN. ONCE, WHEN SOOR WAS AT MATHURA, TULSIDAS, WHO LATER WROTE RAMACHARIT-MANAS, CAME TO SEEK HIS GUIDANCE.



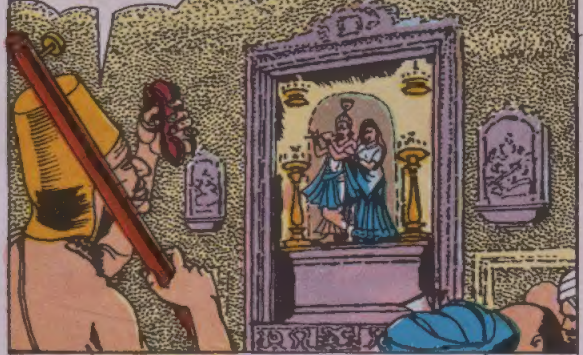
THE TWO STAYED TOGETHER FOR A FEW DAYS. WHEN TULSIDAS WAS ABOUT TO LEAVE —



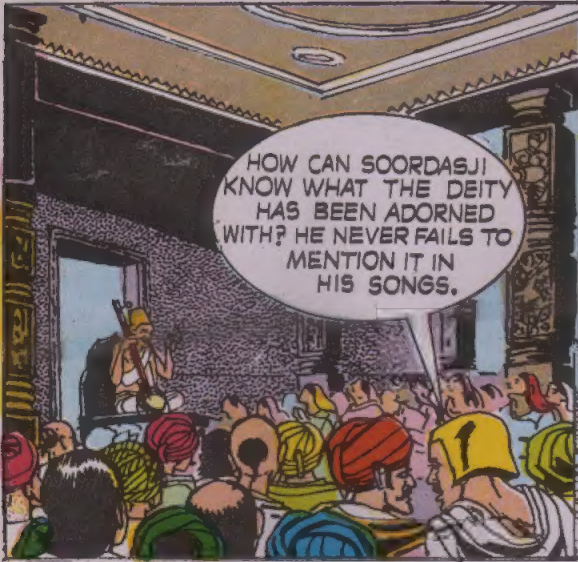
DURING HIS STAY AT MATHURA, SOORDAS COMPOSED A NEW SONG ON KRISHNA EVERY DAY, AND IN EVERY ONE OF THEM HE DESCRIBED THE DEITY.



DRESSED IN BLUE AND WITH A VERMILION MARK ON HER BROAD FOREHEAD, HOW BEAUTIFUL SHE LOOKS!



HOW CAN SOORDASJI KNOW WHAT THE DEITY HAS BEEN ADORNED WITH? HE NEVER FAILS TO MENTION IT IN HIS SONGS.

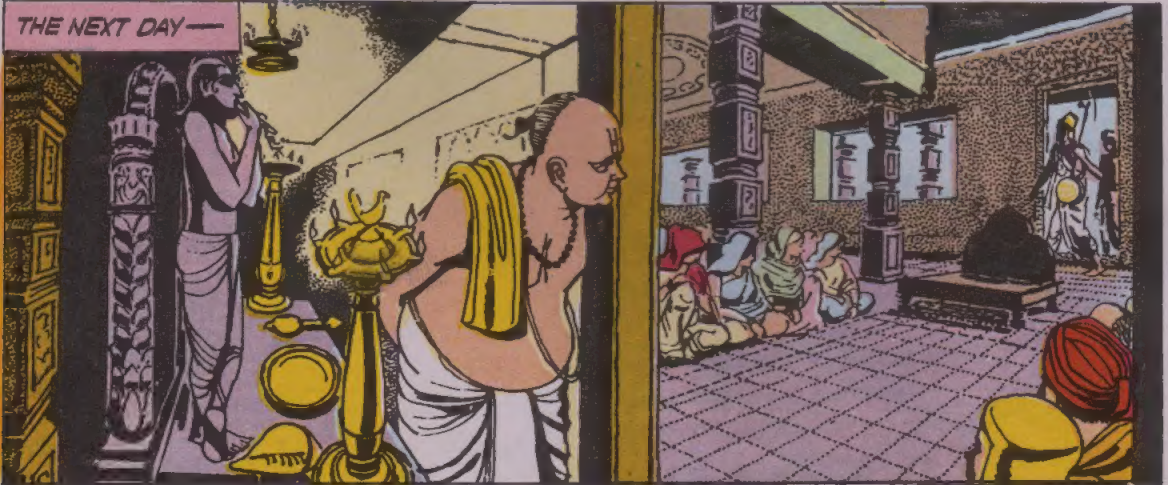


WE MUST TEST HIM.

TOMORROW WE WILL REQUEST THE PRIEST NOT TO ADORN KRISHNA. LET'S SEE WHAT SOOR DOES.



THE NEXT DAY —



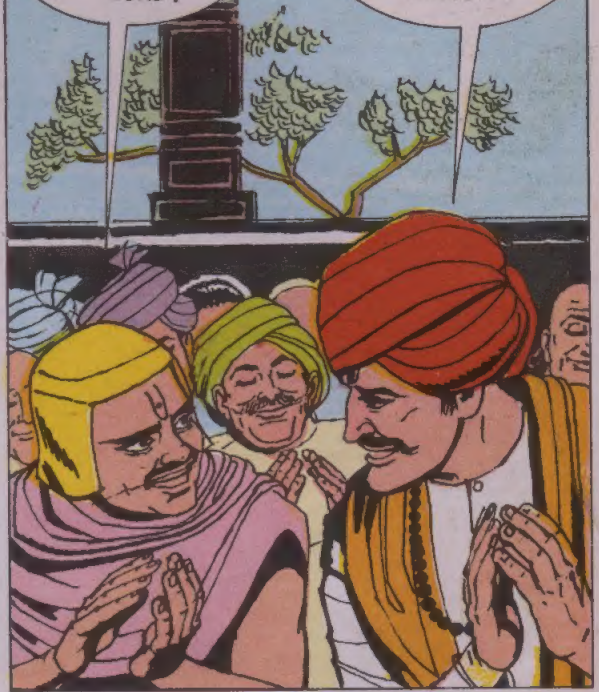
SOOR BEGAN TO SING.

TODAY I SEE
MY LORD
UNADORNED.



HE IS BLIND TO
THE WORLD BUT
CAN SEE THE
LORD!

YES. THEY SAY,
HE HAS BEEN BLESS-
ED WITH DIVINE
VISION.



SOORDAS SPENT MOST OF HIS DAYS AT THE TEMPLE OF SHREENATH. YET, HIS SONGS IN BRIJ BOLI * BECAME SO POPULAR THAT THEY WERE SUNG FROM RAJASTHAN AND PUNJAB IN THE WEST TO ASSAM IN THE EAST.



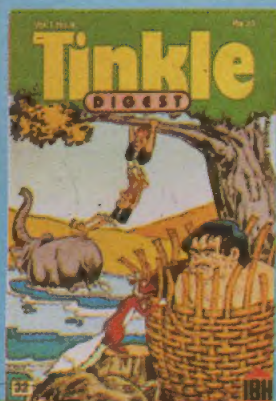
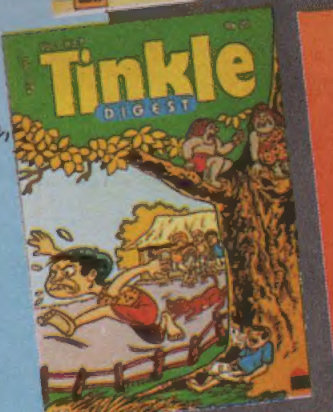
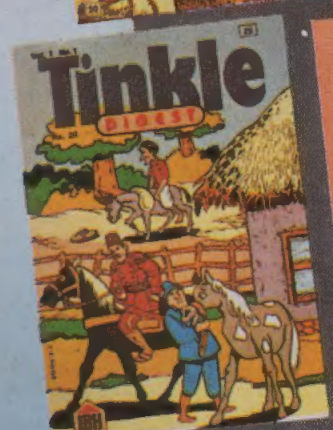
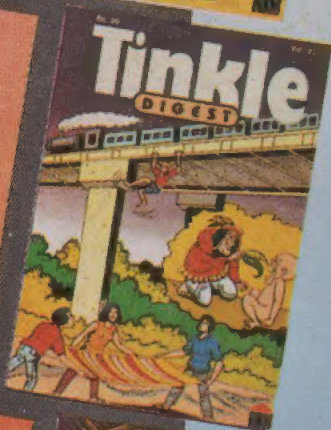
* THE DIALECT OF HINDI SPOKEN IN AND AROUND MATHURA

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